

10-28-2010

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Recommended Citation

"Where Christmas Begins" (2010). *News Releases*. 1084.
https://ecommons.udayton.edu/news_rls/1084

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Where Christmas Begins

10.28.2010 | Campus and Community, Fine Arts, Culture and Society, Catholic

Nativities from Africa and the African-American tradition will be spotlighted in the Marian Library's annual Christmas exhibits on the University of Dayton campus and around the area.

University libraries will welcome the season with a free open house for the premiere of "At the Manger – World Nativity Traditions," an exhibit of more than 200 Nativity scenes, also called crèches, on display through Jan. 31.

The family-oriented event includes children's activities, light refreshments and live entertainment from 1 to 5 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 27, on three floors of Roesch Library at the University of Dayton. It's free and open to the public.

"In many ways, Christmas begins with the Nativity and we are happy to share the treasures of the Marian Library collection with the community as this holy season begins," said Kathleen Webb, dean of University libraries. "So many families have said the open house last year is a wonderful way to welcome the season and a wonderful way to share the Christmas story with children."

In a special display of more than 25 Nativities, "At the Manger" will highlight the artistry and faith of African artists and the African-American tradition in materials ranging from beading to ceramics to hand-carved wood.

The Rev. Johann Roten, S.M., Marian Library director of research and special projects, said the Nativity scene tradition is fairly new in Africa, but is growing as the influence of the Catholic church grows in areas such as Burkina Faso, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

"The African crèche culture is a fairly rich one," Roten said, pointing out a hand-carved set from Togo, which features a large number of people playing musical instruments to greet the birth of Jesus. "When something important happens in this community, traditionally there is always a musical welcome."

Animals gathered around an African manger reflect the wildlife of Africa and might include a tiger, hippo, giraffe or even warthog, he said.

"Each set tells the same story of the Nativity and shows how human culture has helped God's message to be better," said Roten..

New activities this year are three public lectures by Roten, an internationally recognized authority on the Nativity, on Dec. 2, 9 and 16, and The Stable Store, a gift shop with a selection of Nativity-related items.

Several community locations will feature crèche displays during the season, showcasing some of the Marian Library's more than 3,600 Nativity scenes, one of the largest collections in the U.S.

For information on exhibits, hours, directions and parking, visit <http://udayton.edu/libraries/manger> (url: <http://udayton.edu/libraries/manger>) or call 937-229-4234. Guided group tours are available on request by calling 937-229-4214.

University of Dayton exhibits

African Symphony. African and African-American traditions shown in original handmade settings. First floor, University of Dayton Roesch Library. Saturday, Nov. 27, through Monday, Jan. 31.

Vintage Christmas Greetings. A large Christmas tree adorned with vintage Christmas card images. First floor, University of Dayton Roesch Library. Saturday, Nov. 27, through Sunday, Jan. 16.

Narrative Enchantment: Nativity Stories in Gold and Green. Nativities from the Marian Library collection. Seventh floor, University of Dayton Roesch Library. Saturday, Nov. 27, through Monday, Jan. 31. Open 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, noon to 5 p.m. Saturday and 1 to 5 p.m. Sunday.

Small Inspirations: The Nativity in Miniature. Small sets from around the world include many different cultural traditions. Second

floor, University of Dayton Roesch Library. Saturday, Nov. 27, through Monday, Jan. 31.

Narrative Enchantment: Nativity Stories in Gold and Blue. Works by book illustrator Ruth Sanderson. Seventh floor, University of Dayton Roesch Library. Saturday, Nov. 27, through Monday, Jan. 31. Open 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, noon to 5 p.m. Saturday and 1 to 5 p.m. Sunday.

At the Manger Lecture Series. The Rev. Johann Roten, S.M., Marian Library director of research and special projects, three free lectures on the history and tradition of Nativity scenes. Ground floor, University of Dayton Roesch Library, 7 p.m. Thursdays, Dec. 2, 9, and 16.

Community exhibits

Will They Ever Get to the Manger? Nativities from the Marian Library collection explore the many different ways that lead to the manger. Dayton Art Institute, 456 Belmonte Park North, Dayton, Ohio; Tuesday, Nov. 23, through Sunday, Jan. 2. Open 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday; noon to 4 p.m. Sunday; extended hours to 8 p.m. on Thursdays. Closed Mondays and major holidays. For more information, call 937-223-5277.

Crèches Old and New: A European Potpourri. Nativity scenes from Europe, the home of many Christmas traditions as well as new ways of looking at the Christmas scene. The Gallery St. John at Mount Saint John, 4400 Shakertown Road, Dayton, Ohio. Wednesday, Dec. 1, through Sunday, Jan. 2. Open noon to 4 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday. Special hours Dec. 24, 25, 31 and Jan. 1. Other times by appointment. Call 937-320-5405.

Into the Silence. Crèches from the Marian Library. Transfiguration Center, 3505 Calumet Road, Ludlow Falls, Ohio. Sunday, Nov. 28, through Sunday, Jan. 9. Open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. For other hours, call 937-698-7180.

For more information, visit Roesch Library <http://udayton.edu/libraries/manger> or 937-229-4234.